



LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Kimberly A. Foster
Executive Director

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **May 21, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Ann E. Franzen
Dr. La-Doris McClanney
Sandra Rudnick
Stacey Savelle
Adelina Sorkin
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the May 21, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the May 7, 2007, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Vice Chair Sorkin announced that Commissioner Joyce Fahey, who Chaired the Nominations Committee for several years, has resigned from the Commission. A note of appreciation for her service will be sent.

- Commissioners discussed the possibility of cancelling the regular meeting for June 4, 2007 and holding a special meeting in Compton on June 4, 2007. Commissioner Franzen asked other Commissioners to expound on some of the goals and benefits on having meetings in the community. Commissioners replied by indicating that increased access to the community, connecting with the community, and increased community participation were mentioned as benefits. Commissioners discussed the need for additional planning time for a Commission meeting in the community, and decided not to cancel the June 4, 2007 meeting. The Commission decided to explore locating a meeting site in another SPA rather than to revisit SPA 6 again. Commissioner Sorkin recommended scheduling the meeting for Fall 2007 and to have some of the Commissioners work with the Executive Director on the planning. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton volunteered to work on the planning. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton expressed support for having regular meetings in the community to accessibility and connectedness.
- Vice Chair Sorkin introduced Erin Campos and Sandra Jordan who are providing temporary support to the Commission office. Sandra will provide short-term assistance, and Erin will provide longer-term temporary assistance.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- In Trish Ploehn's absence, Susan Kerr introduced Executive Assistant Norma Dreger. Ms. Dreger shared her long experience within the Department of Children and Family Services and expressed her excitement about her position, and invited the Commission to call on her for assistance whenever needed.
- Reports on the County's compliance with the Katie A. lawsuit settlement and on Title IV-E Waiver planning are both due to the Board of Supervisors by the end of June 2007.
- Susan Kerr updated the Commission on DCFS Budget Issues and reported as a result of the rich salary and benefits package was approved last year by the Board of Supervisors, and increased support costs are being passed on to DCFS from ancillary departments like the Auditor-Controller's office, the Chief Administrative Office, the Internal Services Department, and others. DCFS has been unsuccessful in funding those increases, and budget curtailments are now being explored to cover those costs.
- The ASFA Prop "A" Analysis from the Auditor-Controller that was submitted to the Board of Supervisors with regard to the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) relative home assessments was found not be cost-effective to contract out assessment services. The Association of Community Human Services Agencies is concerned that the analysis does not compare apples to apples, however, and Board deputies have requested a meeting with DCFS and the Auditor-Controller's office to discuss the findings.

- The Relative Caregiver package of information discussed by DCFS at the last meeting was distributed to Commissioners, and Ms. Kerr asked that they review it and let the department know of any concerns or questions about its contents. Concern was expressed by some of the Commissioners regarding the Relative packet as being overwhelming. Commissioner Curry requested that DCFS develop a one page “Fact Sheet” to be given to Relative Caregivers with pertinent information. Ms. Kerr stated DCFS will develop a one page fact sheet that will include resources and phone numbers for Relative Caregivers.
- Ms. Kerr discussed AB 277, which, if passed, would increase the training and information provided to foster parents and other caregivers beginning in July 2008. Staff of the sponsoring Legislator, Assembly Member Nell Soto, confirmed that the bill’s intent was not to give caregivers *De Facto* status, but to ensure that they receive copies of case plans, court reports, and other information.
- DCFS Risk Management Division Chief Paul Buehler reported that, as of Thursday, all 30-day child fatality reports for 2007 have been completed, with the exception of one needing further information that will be finished today. A report to that effect will be issued to County Counsel. No 90-day reports are past due, and the two that are due at the beginning of June are expected to be completed on time. Buehler explained that an initial list of incidents compiled from hotline notifications may differ from a list of 30- and 90-day reports, since DCFS does not investigate cases in which a victim had no prior history with the department. Commissioner Susan Friedman has been receiving the fatality and serious incident tracking log since the middle of April, and Commissioner Worthy-Clayton asked if Mr. Buehler would forward log to other Commissioners as well, since its information is more timely than 30- and 90-day reports and would allow trends and actions taken to be better tracked.

Ms. Kerr announced that Mr. Buehler has assumed responsibility for the Health and Safety division, as well as for Risk Management, and thanked him for his service.

TITLE IV-E WAIVER IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

DCFS, Deputy Director, Lisa Parrish informed the Commission the State has accepted Los Angeles County’s Title IV-E Waiver Implementation Plan, and the official written approval is still pending. A report on Implementation Priorities is due to the Board of Supervisors by July 1, 2007 and the Waiver Management Team, indicated the drafts are nearly ready for external review.

Overall, DCFS and the Probation Department have identified 23 initiatives to be implemented over the waiver’s five-year period, all of which are meant to increase safety, permanency, and child well-being while continuing to reduce the numbers of children and youth in out-of-home care. Approximately \$62.5 million is projected to be available for reinvestment over the waiver period, 20 percent of which—or about \$12 million—will be used during the first year, beginning July 1. Federal guidelines allow the use of up to 40 percent of funds in the first few years, but talks with Federal and State officials, as well

as conversations with other waiver jurisdictions around the country, have persuaded Los Angeles County that it would not be wise to front-load the savings. Instead, the emphasis will be on generating more savings before spending further reinvestments.

Lisa reported both DCFS and Probation meet regularly with the Chief Administrative Office, and agree that good management data and reporting functions are a main concern in tracking waiver success. DCFS has begun a report inventory, identifying gaps and duplications, and a small group is pulling together a 'dashboard' of key management reports for regional administrators to better manage waiver outcomes. (For instance, the main DCFS computer system, CWS/CMS, tracks information on children in out-of-home care but does not itemize services their families may be receiving. Likewise, family preservation data systems don't show substance abuse treatment or other community services.) Information technology representatives are also helping Probation with input into CWS/CMS.

A Joint Communication Plan is being developed to provide regular opportunities for stakeholder input through the Kinship Cabinet and numerous existing work groups. A dedicated e-mail address for waiver messages has been set up, information will be posted on websites, and regular communication 'blasts' are planned. A Learning Opportunity Group (LOG) meeting has been scheduled for July 27, 2007, similar to that held last August 2006.

The two departments will split first-year funds along current reimbursement lines, with 80 percent (\$10 million) going to DCFS and 20 percent (\$2 million) going to Probation. DCFS targets for the first phase of implementation include:

- **Expanding Family Team Decision-Making** to require quarterly permanency planning conferences for all children in out-of-home care (a core recommendation of the family reunification work group in September 2004); more TDM facilitators will be trained and begin the expansion with younger children in group homes, long-time group-home residents, and children in facilities with low RCL levels
- **Expanding Family-Finding and Engagement Efforts** from Metro North into three more offices, establishing a permanency unit (with caseloads of 15) for children with difficult placement histories and no permanency resources in sight
- **Providing "Up-Front" Assessments** for substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence, building on the program pioneered in Compton by SHIELDS for Families, Inc., and contracting with family preservation providers to phase in these assessments to four additional DCFS offices
- Executing a series of contracts to embed more funds in communities to achieve the goals of the **Prevention Initiative**

Lisa Parrish informed the Commission that DCFS is proceeding cautiously with the initial IV-E Waiver spending as they have been in communication with others who are involved with IV-E in other states.

The second sequence of DCFS priority activities will include looking at:

- Controls on community-based placements so that children are more often placed locally; this will lead to questions about the targeted recruitment of foster parents and foster family agencies, high-need areas, and high-need populations such as sibling groups, special-needs children, and teens
- Aftercare supports following residential treatment and family reunification
- Ways to achieve caseload and workload reductions

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton commented on the complexities of the balance between placement availability and need, and recommended analyzing first-sequence activities prior to any changes in policy. She suggested that the Departments give consideration to proceeding cautiously with policy changes until an assessment of how the implementation is proceeding with meeting goals/outcome. The presenters concurred, and indicated there would be no immediate changes occurring.

Probation Deputy Director, Jitahadi Imara spoke of the Probation Department and indicated the IV-E Waiver provides a great opportunity and also the challenges in weaving waiver planning into its Camp Redesign and Internal Reorganization, and in coordinating with DCFS, the Department of Mental Health, group home providers, and other human services agencies. Other efforts—the Mental Health Services Act, the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act, community strategies, and so on—will also help bring waiver efforts to scale.

Commissioner Biondi inquired if the DCFS and Probation Implementation plans are similar. Both DCFS and Probation indicated there will be similarities.

According to Mr. Imara, the first sequence of Probation activities will include:

- Restructuring Probation's placement unit with new integrated protocols for assessments, placement decisions, resources, and coordinating group home care and a child's return to the community, stemming the tide of crossover youth and particularly addressing the role of parents and the treatment of delinquency factors with evidence-based therapies and multi-agency intervention teams
- Reviewing the policy governing suitable placement
- Monthly performance reviews by placement managers to track waiver outcomes and performance measures
- Beginning at the executive level and cascading down, a massive training campaign that will involve DCFS, DMH, and service providers
- Addressing Probation's woefully under-resourced scope of work

With regard to dually supervised youth, Carol Sanchez reported that Probation is working with DCFS and the courts to pilot multidisciplinary assessments when dependency youth are arrested. Historically, three Probation staff have worked with dually supervised youth, with caseloads of 100 each. That staff complement has increased to six, who are helping to educate all probation officers about better placement decisions. Lisa Campbell-Mouton is responsible for integrating quality assurance into waiver activities, ensuring fidelity to program models and making corrections in real time. DCFS's Susan Kerr emphasized the dynamic nature of the waiver process, saying that both departments will closely track outcomes to make sure that specific initiatives are successfully progressing.

Commissioner Biondi inquired about the possibility of Probation's "picking up" some of the Group Home contracts from DCFS and eliminating less effective contractors. Ms. Sanchez said that no formal process was in place, but the uniform outcomes for group homes established in the waiver plan should quickly identify those that deliver good services. As part of the residentially based services work group, Probation is participating in joint monitoring visits to probation sites and working on first-ever scorecards for group homes and foster family agencies. These should be finalized by July for DCFS, and Probation is planning similar instruments within the next year. Ms. Parrish offered to brief Commissioners on this project at a future meeting.

Commissioner Biondi also asked if waiver planning had spurred new thinking about the way that Title IV-E monies are normally spent; Probation's last budget allocated \$4 million to camp transition, \$14 million to community-based programs, and \$7 million to suitable placement. Mr. Imara said that the discussions are ongoing about resources that could be provided at the front end to reduce the number of children in group homes, and how family capacity might be strengthened overall.

Paul Freese from Public Counsel asked if Family-Finding efforts within the Title IV-E waiver activities were linking with mentoring programs, and Ms. Campbell-Mouton replied that Jed Minoff's Emancipation Services Section in the Probation Department is very much involved when youth lack other permanent adult relationships.

Ms. Parrish reported that an expansion of the Linkages pilot, which connects families to CalWORKs and other programs administered by the Department of Public Social Services, is also planned, that will include some overlap with Probation in Family-Finding efforts is expected.

ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT (ASFA)

On behalf of Angela Carter, Teri Gillams reviewed the provisions of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), which requires that the homes of Relative Caregivers and Non-Related Extended family members be held to the same standards as those of Foster Parents. DCFS has been working diligently to reduce its backlog of assessments and yearly reassessments, and Gillams introduced Jennifer Lopez, charged with spearheading that task since her appointment as Kinship Division Manager ten weeks ago.

Ms. Lopez explained that assessments had fallen behind partly because of the decentralization of ASFA staff and communication problems. A new structure of centralization/co-location, which will place an ASFA unit and supervisor in each DCFS Regional Office, should be in place by July 1, 2007. In the last ten weeks, the original backlog of about 3,400 cases has been considerably reduced, and the goal is to 'zero out' by June 15, 2007. Ninety-four percent of reassessments due in March and April have been completed, but a greater number of initial assessments are necessary, and they take longer. With the new structure, regional offices will average about 18 assessments/reassessments per month, which staff believes can be performed in a timely fashion. Ms. Lopez has also been working with the Juvenile Courts to re-place children when homes do not pass inspection, and has concluded that more training is necessary so workers can initially place children with other family members, if they see that a given relative's home will be denied. Ms. Lopez also stated that staff will begin conducting joint initial and annual to address the backlog on initial assessments that were not completed.

Efforts are also being made to speed up the criminal waiver turnaround from 30 days to 3 days, and DCFS in general does its best to help families obtain any equipment they lack for ASFA compliance. Beds and cribs are a particular need, and a supply of fire extinguishers and safety latches has been laid in so they can be given out right away. The lengthy purchasing process remains an issue. Ms. Kerr reported that the Auditor-Controller's office has assigned a temporary representative to restructure procurement. Major improvements are expected.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton informed the Commission that she has scheduled a "ride along" with workers performing assessments and reassessments, and Ms. Lopez extended an invitation for other Commissioners are welcome to do the same. Vice Chair Rudnick congratulated Ms. Lopez on having done a remarkable job of cleaning up the backlog in a very short time.

ASFA RELATIVE CAREGIVER

Susie Barkely-Jones who indicated she has been a Relative Caregiver for over 15 years and is a staff person with the Community Coalition reported favorable encounters with ASFA workers in her own home, in her role as an advocate has communicated with numerous caregivers who have had problems getting their homes certified.

- Throughout the community, some DCFS workers are disrespectful of caregivers and not mindful of family culture and traditions, nor, in many cases, of simple courtesy.
- When homes are approved, written notification is seldom provided, though denial letters are quick to arrive.
- The process is so disorganized that a second ASFA worker may call for another inspection within one to three months. If caregivers cannot produce the approval letter from the initial inspection, they are considered out of compliance if they refuse to schedule another.

- Workers seldom put in writing what repairs are needed for homes to pass inspection, and caregivers are not informed of existing resources that can aid them in making those repairs. This is especially an issue for relatives on fixed incomes, whose finances are already stretched.

Vice Chair Sorkin suggested that DCFS work with other jurisdictions to identify municipal and other sources for helping with compliance issues to assist families. The city of Pasadena, for example, provides no-cost home repair for seniors, and Santa Fe Springs has a similar program.

Ms. Lopez indicated she will speak to the Community Coalition this evening, and will regularly attend its monthly meetings to hear more concerns. She is conducting a training in June for ASFA workers, and intends to address the accusations of rudeness and unprofessional conduct. “Relatives are doing us a huge favor,” she said, and workers need to display respect and pay attention, in particular, to generational expectations of courtesy. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton inquired if the “Non-ASFA” staff might also receive the training, Ms. Lopez will follow-up.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Relative caregiver Evelyn Mason amplified Ms. Barkely-Jones’ comments about the serious problems that she and others have experienced with ASFA assessments:
 - ✓ When written notification of a home’s approval is not received, repeated requests for approval letters are ignored. Without proof of the home’s having passed ASFA inspection, judges can order a child’s removal, Medi-Cal funding can be lost, and delays in case dispositions can occur.
 - ✓ Much confusion exists within DCFS about whether assessments have been performed, and relatives receive repeated calls to arrange inspections that have already been done.
 - ✓ Assessment workers arrive with one sheet of paper only, on which they tick off the faults of the home. Relatives are not told that financial assistance exists for repairs, and are often forced to use their own funds when they don’t have to.

Ms. Mason strongly urged DCFS to train its social workers and eligibility workers about ASFA issues, and to ensure that its files and procedures are organized.

- A representative from Los Angeles County Resource Families echoed these concerns, stressing the importance of kinship care and appropriate training. She decried ASFA as another opportunity for relative caregivers to be told their homes aren’t good enough, and called on relatives and foster parents alike to demand respect.

MEETING ADJOURNED